Laura Hatcher oral history interview

Captain, United States Navy
Persian Gulf War – Global War on Terror

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Abstract: Laura Hatcher describes her thirty-nine-year career as a Navy intelligence officer. Hatcher comes from a family of veterans and joined the Navy in 1987. She talks about her experience in the Naval Academy, her various early naval assignments, and how she came to be a Naval intelligence officer. Hatcher also discusses her becoming a parent while overseas and parenting while in the military. Besides being an intelligence officer, Hatcher served in the Navy Reserve management doing important administrative work and helping fellow service members. She then discusses her experience as an officer stationed in Hawaii during 9/11, as a woman in the Navy, and her time abord the USS George H.W Bush. She also gives advice to young people joining the service.

Transcript Notes:

Transcriber:	TEMI
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Additional Notes:

LH: Laura Hatcher
HS: Heidi Sheldon

Interview Transcript:

HS (00:00:01):
This is Heidi Sheldon archivist with the Virginia war Memorial. And today is Friday, December 11th, 2020. And I'm here with Laura Hatcher. Laura, thank you so much for talking to me today.

LH (00:00:12):
You're welcome. My pleasure.

HS (00:00:14):
Can you tell me a little bit about where you grew up?

LH (00:00:19):
Uh, so I am what we affectionately called a military brat, specifically, a Navy brat, meaning that my, um, one of my parents was in the service. And so, uh, we followed, um, my stepfather around during my childhood. So I grew up originally was born in London, England to a single mother. She'd be married to an American sailor, uh, when I was nine and we moved around and followed his career. Uh, so if you can imagine going from, um, the high streets of London to the cobblestones of Rota, Spain, which is a small fishing village and the Southern part of Spain, which has one of the larger, uh, air bases, um, and ports, if you will, uh, for the United States, Navy and military. And we moved to rota Spain when I was nine, I stayed there for about four years. From there, we went to, uh, California.

LH (00:01:15):
Um, I was actually lucky because my stepfather had a clause. I don't, they don't do this anymore. He had a clause in his contract that he could only go to warm locations because he had really bad asthma. Yay us. So we, uh, lived in tropical places, which I know is a bummer, but we were, those people were the ones that took up all those spots. So we went from Rhoda, Spain to San Diego, California. Uh, and then, um, I did middle school there and then he got posted in, uh, the Republic of Panama. Uh, I will tell you that is not on the hit parade list. If you want to spend junior prom anywhere. I do not recommend the Republic of Panama five minutes before, uh, the dictator Noriega decides that he's having tantrums and then we come and storm in. So that's always not a good scenario. So we were, uh, my mother and I, uh, obviously were asked to leave, uh, sooner. Um, and, uh, and we went back to San Diego and then, um, from there, I, I joined, uh, maybe myself, um, to the Naval Academy process. So, um, so really the nutshell I've grown up in Europe, in Southern California and central America.

HS (00:02:38):
And what made you choose the Navy?

LH (00:02:41):
I think it chose me. Um, so being, uh, drafted if you will, by a step parent. So my, my stepfather, uh, is a disciplinarian, uh, love him very much, um, but very Puerto Rican, so Hispanic background, um, very strict, uh, and, and everything. While I growing up, was it in my memory

anyway, seemed like I was already a sailor, so, uh, I'm not joking. He would inspect my room. Maybe he was joking, but at the time I didn't think it was a joke when he came in with a white glove and showed me, Hey, you know, there's still dust.

LH (00:03:25):

Well, it's because you have a white glove on not because there's dust. Um, but, uh, yes, uh, you know, when you move around as a child, you become used to the moving, it almost becomes part of your DNA. And so I will tell you if I didn't go into the military, I probably would have joined something that, that resulted in me leaving every two or three years, just because you get that itch to move. Uh, when, um, you're part of the military community, um, uh, my natural father was in the air force and, and I could tell, uh, he didn't have much input into my life, but I could tell that he would prefer I would've gone to the air force. Um, but you know, being in all these tropical countries with water and ships, that was a big influence obviously. And how did you decide on the Naval Academy?

LH (00:04:19):

Um, so the story that I like to tell is there was one young man, um, who upset me enough, um, that I decided I'll show you, uh, when I was 15, my, uh, my dad who, my stepfather, but I call him my dad since he raised me. My dad introduced me to a young Marine. Um, so this would have been about, let's see, 85, 80, 1984, 1985 that's to put into context five years after the first class of women have graduated, right? Because the first class went in, in 76, we're doing math in public law, try and keep it simple for me. So from 76 hours to 80, that's the first group. So this gentleman, um, probably was in that first class of, of, uh, where he had a female, um, peers. And, um, he was very respectful, um, obviously very young, uh, Marine Corps, uh, officer that was stationed in where my father and my dad was just trying to, uh, expose me to, um, some, some mentorship through opportunities that he knew.

LH (00:05:34):

He knew this individual had graduated from the naval academy so he thought he would introduce and see if he could give me some insight. So this gentleman took out all of his yearbooks, talked about the naval Academy, got me all pumped up. And then at the very end of the story, I just, I just remember him saying, well, yeah, it's a great place, but you probably wouldn't make it because you're a girl. And you know, that really pissed me off because I wasn't just any girl to put things into context. I was a tomboy. I was the kid that I was the girl that tried out for the football team, not the cheerleading team, you know, uh, when I was, when we were stationed in Panama, they didn't have, um, a swim team. So I'm like, well, I'll just swim on myself. I'll be the team.

LH (00:06:21):

So I would compete and go to the competitions. My mom would take me, um, and I would represent my high school. And, you know, I was, you can't tell me I can't do that. That sounds like a challenge kind of person, you know? So, um, needless to say, I did apply, um, it was very challenging back then because there's no internet, it's all those little bubble charts that you fill out, but people probably don't remember that, but we actually had pencil back then and you fill out the form and you sent it in and sending it in from overseas. Um, my application got lost. Um,

and so I had to do it again once I got to California, uh, and, uh, applying to Naval Academy. I know the details now because I help young men and women high schoolers do the same thing. I'm a blue and gold officer, which is a voluntary position, but it's a very convoluted, complicated process. Uh, and so that in itself is a test, right? To see if the young man or woman can, can follow through and actually apply themselves to not only an application for a congressional nomination, right. But an application to the, the service Academy itself. Um, and it's even harder with pencil overseas in a third world country.

LH (00:07:43):

That was a long answer. Sorry.

HS (00:07:46):

That was great. Um, what was your experience at the Naval Academy?

LH (00:07:49):

Like, um, I had a very, um, very positive experience. Um, I was recruited for volleyball. Um, even though they'll tell you that they don't recruit, but they do. Uh, and you know, when you're part of a team and this goes to anything really, it's a high school in your career when you're already part of a family, you know, um, there's that insulation, that natural insulation that, that family provides you. Um, and so at the Naval Academy, um, having that extra family on top of the new family that you discover when you get there, um, it's very helpful, especially that first year to get you through because you now have someplace that you can go, uh, you know, to the, the sanctuary, the safety of a, uh, a locker room.

LH (00:08:48):

Um, and you know, the upperclassmen that you're interacting with that are your teammates, you know, you get to see that they're real people, um, and they tend to mentor you and take care of you as well. And, you know, when you go back to the real world, so to speak inside the Academy, um, it makes it a little bit easier knowing that you have a place that it's safe, you know, and it helps you get through that. Um, I can't imagine going through the Naval Academy without that team support that I have, and, uh, made some amazing friends, um, one that's my best friend to this day. And then there's a few minutes away. Um, and we stayed in touch, you know, throughout all of our careers and she got out. Um, but we we've stayed in touch to this day and I've known her since she was 18.

LH (00:09:30):

You know, you don't find those kinds of friendships everywhere. So, um, but I've very positive experience with the Naval Academy. For me, I again get bored very easily. So the things I did at Naval Academy, um, there were so many opportunities back then or even more now. Um, but you know, I jumped out of airplanes. Um, I went to dive school. I was on the karate club. I, you know, I did volleyball, uh, obviously because I felt obligated since they recruited me, but I also, uh, plebe year, I tried out for track, you know, um, and then suddenly my grades were saying, Hey, you know, remember us

Speaker 3 (00:10:10):

Not that good. So keep this up. And we won't be around long enough, so I have to kind of throttle back a little bit. Okay.

LH (00:10:16):

And all those extra activities and focus on the academics. I would, uh, I wouldn't say I was a stellar, um, student, um, and I probably had to study more than your average person. Um, but having those activities really helped, uh, to, to get you through that place. So what did you do upon graduation? Uh, so when I graduated, because I still had a very large ego, uh, in my twenties, I was a Navy diver. Uh, back then it was called special operations. Um, the diving community has changed drastically since the early nineties in that when you first graduated, you were required to go and do, uh, a salvage tour, um, which basically meant you were a surface warfare officer with a diving, um, specialty. So I went through quite a bit of training. Um, I had already been to dive school as a midshipman, got my scuba bubble. So when I went back to dive school, some of my instructors, um, were still there. I remembered me, but now I'm going through hard hat, right? So I'm being, um, a little bit more grueling than, than scuba. Um, I was qualified to dive 190 feet, uh, on air. Um, and you go through, um, I ended up spending probably more time than I should have because, um, I didn't actually show up at dive school prepared physically as much as I should have been even though. Um, and there's a story there

Speaker 3 (00:11:51):

After I graduated from the Academy, I had

LH (00:11:54):

An opportunity. I had a minor in, um, minored in French. I had an opportunity to go to Paris on exchange student, uh, kind of a semester in Paris after graduation. And unfortunately I didn't take my, um, my working out and staying fit as seriously as I should have. Um, I worked out with chocolate crepes, probably wine. Um, didn't run didn't, didn't swim. And my excuse was I couldn't find those places in the heart of Paris. So needless to say that, keep in mind to be a Navy diver. There were no, there's no difference between the woman's standards and the men's standards. They are identical. And because it's one of those elite kind of communities, right. It's high risk. Um, you have to be very strong to, to be able to wear all that gear. And so I was at the top of my, uh, athleticism, if you will, when I graduated, but that little vacation in Paris didn't help.

LH (00:12:54):

So I show up at dive school and I, uh, you're supposed to do six pull-ups, um, for the entry, you know, you take a test and you have to run, you have to swim push-ups and sit-ups and pull-ups, and you have to do a minimum of six pull-ups. And I missed it by one. Uh, and the reason for that, besides the crepes and the wine is because for women, um, you know, we don't have as much natural, upper body strength. We have to work to get that right. And so in order for me, um, in steady state, um, rested to jump up and do 10 pull-ups, I physically have to train to do 20 so that when I'm tired or eating crepes, I can still do a minimum of 10. And so, um, that was a hard lesson for me. It was a great lesson for me.

LH (00:13:45):

What ends up happening is I got rolled back. I couldn't class up, you know, the rules of the rules. And so I ended up, um, they ended up stashing me for four months in the instructor Bay, um, being the admin, can't repeat that word, but being the admin person for the CEO. And so the next class came four months later. Uh, and believe me, I was ready because during that four months I was required to PT. I went in the gym, I lifted and yeah, by the time that next class I could probably do 15, 20 pull-ups no problem, because I was more mortified. Right.

LH (00:14:25):

I'm thankful for the lessons because you learn from your lessons. I've used that lesson on one of my son's getting ready for his military school. I, you know, you're in the summer, I woke him up at six in the morning. I'm like, let me tell you about Paris, crepes, wine, pullups. Okay. Whatever the mom we'll go running. I was trying to impress upon him that, Hey, when you get to your military prep school, um, because he's, he has aspirations to go into a service Academy as well. They're going to give you a PT test and I know you're in shape, but you don't stay in shape. You won't be able to do really well when you're tired. So I don't even remember what your question was, but yes.

HS (00:15:15):

So once you completed the dive school, where did you go?

LH (00:15:23):

Uh, so after dive school, I had to go to surface worker officer school, which is up in Newport, Rhode Island.And I went through, I would give you timeframes, but I can barely remember what I have for breakfast. I want to say the whole process took over a year because of the extra four months. I think Dyersville was six months. And then another six months up at, uh, let's just say I was, I had almost put on another rank by the time I actually got to my ship because there's so much training, right? You don't typically see Ensigns out in the fleet anyway, or ones, uh, because they're usually in the books training somewhere. They hide us until it's, you know, polite to let us out. We know how to salute and not get in trouble. Um, but, uh, yes, I went to Newport Rhode Island for surface worker officer school, as well as, uh, engineering officer of the watch school, which essentially, because I got assigned to a, an ARS 50, which, uh, we had four of those in our, in the Navy at the time, uh, ARS, um, 50 classes, a diving and salvage ship and it's diesel.

LH (00:16:23):

And so anytime I'm a sailor or an officer gets assigned to a place, typically Navy is going to give you some type of training to help you in route that that has something to do with that command. So for me, a diesel ship means I need to go and learn about a diesel diesel engine. Uh, and it was a hard school. Oh my gosh, not an engineer. Remember I, I, uh, studied volleyball at the Naval Academy. Math is not my strong suit. Um, but I remember studying my butt off at a engineering officer's school. Um, that, and the whole point is that when you get to the ship, you know, part of your qualification, when you're on the ship to get your [?] pin, which, which denotes a successful tour, you don't get to leave the ship unless you, you leave with a qualification.

LH (00:17:16):

Well, part of that is qualifying on all the watches that run that. And so when I got to the ship, you know, the expectation is that I start from the ground up. Doesn't matter that you're an officer. We had to start from the very bottom where the very junior sailors were standing sound in security, where you go around and you check, check all the temperatures and the gauges all the way up to, you know, officer of the deck, which is driving the ship. You had to go through all those different watch stations, including the engineering spaces. And I was petrified, you know, that the engine would blow up. And I, you know, everything that I memorize in diesel school was gone, right. Let's face it, I'm stationed in Hawaii. That was my first door. You know, it's really hard to concentrate on engines you're in Hawaii, but yes. Um, but it was, it was tough. It was, it was, uh, uh, pretty hard to get through those schoolings and then retain the knowledge and then go to a ship and then get tested again. Right. Because now you you're learning out of a book in school, but when you go to the actual ship, you know, it's, it doesn't necessarily correlate to the books.

HS (00:18:34):

So what was your next assignment after Hawaii?

LH (00:18:35):

Um, so after my first ship in Hawaii, that's what I discovered that they lied. There's no diving in diving and, um, I will be honest. I didn't have a great first tour. Um, I, uh, In fact, I wanted to quit called up my dad's and I don't like it. I don't, I don't want to know, want to do this anymore. And he, um, used some eloquent words that I won't repeat, but there are written on internet somewhere and he's basically told me, you know, no, you we'll try something else. And he taught me how to put in, what's called a lateral transfer package. And when you laterally transfer, basically what you're doing is you're asking your service to consider allowing you to compete for another community. But the catch is you have to be qualified in your last community to leave.

LH (00:19:30):

So remember that pin I talked about, so you still have to get that pin. Right. So, okay. So I got my pin finally, the very end and, uh, and I put in a request to laterally transfer from Navy diving into, and you have to put several choices in case they're not all available. And I requested intelligence and cryptology. I could barely spell cryptology, but my dad was a cryptologist. So he said, put that down. I'm like, okay. I had no clue what that was. Um, and then, uh, they came back, um, you know, and it's a very competitive process. You're competing with, um, quite a few people. And they only take a small percentage, but they accepted me, uh, into intelligence. And then from there, I had to go back to school, yay, whole nother year of school. But this time I was at school longer than I was supposed to.

LH (00:20:25):

Not because I failed anything or ate too many crepes but because that year, um, it would've been 95, 96, the government is the first time I remember the government ran out of money. And so after we all finished intelligence school, nobody could move. I remember that much. So I was at intelligence school in dam neck, Virginia, that's where the Navy intelligence and the Marine Corps intelligence center is right on the beautiful water. I was there for a whole year. Um, and, uh, waiting for the government to come back, give us some money. And in the meantime, I did

my intelligence training. Uh, I'm a Lieutenant now, right? Uh, I've just come from sea and qualified. I've got salt, I've got leadership. You know, I commanded, well, I didn't command anything, but I was in charge of people. And now I am suddenly the class leader of what I like to say, 25. It's snot nosed ensigns, just come out of naval academy who think that they're big and mighty. Uh, and pretty much everybody at most of your instructors at intelligence school were my peers, right? Because that's their tour. That's their service there. Their command is now teaching as lieutenants, baby. And since coming in, but when you laterally transfer, you're the same rank, right? Because you decided to change your community. So they looked at me and said, Oh, goodie, you have leadership. You've been to see, you can take care of all your kids.

LH (00:22:05):

I'm like, wait, no, no, no. I'm here to study. I have to study this stuff. It doesn't come naturally to me. No, you do that to take care of the 25. And so I ended up being class leader and mother hen too, um, and that year, that was a year that, uh, the office of Naval intelligence. ONI had a pilot program where they were integrating civilians into the intelligence school because they, they were essentially sibling equivalent. Uh, so not only did I have all these Ensigns, but I had like five or six civilians who were GS equivalent to me and would tell me that, you know, you know, I am the same rank as you. And I'm like, yeah, I know, but I'm in charge. So are you taking out the garbage or not.

LH (00:23:00):

Uh, so that was a little bit of pressure, uh, because, Oh, and I just got married too. So that adds some more pressure on there. A little bit of pressure taking care because I would get random phone calls in the middle of the night. You know, my husband would laugh, even talks about he's like the phone calls would be something like, what do you mean he was car surfing. He was wearing his uniform while he was car surfing. Where is he? Now, there were three of you in uniform. Was the car moving?

HS (00:23:37):

I mean, I've been a spouse to hear some of those one sided things before.

LH (00:23:42):

and hang up. My was husband was like, what ensign was that? The same ensign that you know, did whatever last week. Yeah. That was my life. And, Oh, by the way, don't forget to study and pass because you're senior, you, you've got all this bling on your uniform, they're expecting you to already know this stuff.

LH (00:24:02):

Right. It's intelligence. I can't look at the sky and tell you that's what kind of plane it is it just because I'm a Lieutenant doesn't mean I'm automatically smart. It was a lot of pressure, you know? Um, so anyway, that was, that was a fun, uh, and I'm sure you're going to ask me, where did you go after Intel school? So I had an opportunity to go to Japan, uh, and, um, my husband and I, um, while I was at Intel school, he was studying, um, or his master's in to, um, in education. And we went to Japan for our first tour. Um, and he taught in the Japanese system and I was stationed in a, um, an air force base, which was interesting and eye opening in and of itself.

Um, got to learn a little bit about air force culture and living in air force housing, uh, and the hierarchy of who's cool. And who's not because apparently my base wasn't a fighter base. It was a trash hauler base. And so we don't get as much money for the gardens as the , you know, as the, as the fighters. Yeah. Okay. Um, I just know that Navy bases are ugly, period. It doesn't matter how much money you give them.

LH (00:25:20):

Uh, so Yokota air base, uh, is about, I don't know, 45 minutes North of Tokyo. Uh, and that's, uh, where we were stationed. Um, that was my first intelligence tour. Um, and we were in a very small detachment, joint detachment, joint meeting with other services, um, in the basement of, um, one of the commands there. And, um, that was a great tour. I really enjoyed it. And that's where I had my first son. Um, uh, my eldest son was born in, in Tokyo, uh, in, in Yokota air base, which essentially is North of Tokyo.

HS (00:25:59):

So what was it like becoming a parent overseas?

LH (00:26:06):

Uh, what was like coming to parent period? It doesn't matter what, uh, it was challenging, uh, because, um, I always wanted kids. I was an only child. And I remember thinking when I was growing up, I am never doing this to somebody else.

LH (00:26:21):

This is horrible. You know, I was always a kid that was always bored. Remember I said that I was always bored and my parents would always tease me. Oh, it's because you're a boring person. My dad would say things like, go play with traffic. And I, you know, you don't realize they're, they're joking. You just get more mad. I'm never doing this. I'm having 25 kids so they can all play together. Okay. We narrow the 25 down to three, but, uh, uh, Parenthood is, is amazing. Um, and scary all at the same time. Right. Because it's just a social experiment. You never know if you've done it right until it's, it's too late. Right. And you're, you're watching as they become adults. Well, what do you mean? You don't know how to screw in a light bulb? Did I not tell you how to do that? So the cool thing about being, uh, in the military is when you're in a leadership position and you have junior sailors, and I think we've talked about this when we first met, um, what I remember when I was in command, some of my junior sailors would get in trouble.

LH (00:27:31):

And then it was a great parenting kind of mentorship program internally. Right. I go home and I go, Hey, you do know that just because you got checkbook doesn't mean you just write checks, right. You have to have money in the account or whatever my sailors got in trouble for. I'd go back and say, do you know, just checking, just want to make sure, you know, because essentially, you know, when you're 18, 19, if you don't know something, you know, the only person's fault it is the parent that just left you, you have more kids, you realize as the person one goes out and goes to college and calls back and says, Hey, you didn't say, blah, blah, blah, blah. Then you hang up and go to the other two kids. I'm going to teach you something today.

LH (00:28:21):

Do realize that the plunger goes in the toilet right now. You never stop. You're constantly, I know you have children, so you never stop learning, you know? And it's even better when you have older friends and my older, I mean, more seasoned. Right. And they can kind of mentor you. Uh, and so we, when you're in a military community and you live in military housing, whether you want the mentorship or not, it's a small town, so you're going to learn vicariously through your neighbors. Um, but we had some great friends that would live across the way and that they already had toddlers when I was born. So I was inundated with advice. Um, but it was a sense of community. Um, and so you can kind of, you know, cause you don't get issued any kind of handbook for this parenting thing.

LH (00:29:12):

So it was very nice. And even just something as simple as a Crib, which is impossible to get, uh, overseas, you know, this is before the internet age, before Amazon. Uh, and so, you know, I had, I had, uh, classmates in the Naval Academy that were stationed over there and they gave me all of their furniture, you know, which was amazing and all of their baby clothes, um, needless to say, I probably could have got it eventually, um, if, if we had shipped it over, but it was very nice to have that, that support. So I would say specifically to your question, parenting overseas, um, in the military community, um, it, while it's challenging and it's respect, there's definitely a lot of resources and support, you know, because you already have those before you become, you know, uh, before the pre-parenting part, you already have that, that established a sense of community.

HS (00:30:11):

Can you tell me a little bit about how you, You decided that you would make the Navy, your longterm Career?

LH (00:30:20):

You get to a point, point of no return. I like to say where you've invested so much time and energy, it would, you know, unless you're absolutely failing or absolutely miserable, you know, and in my case, They kept promoting me. So, you know, you just, before you know it, you, you're still in and it's 10 years. And keep in mind, I went through preparatory school for Naval Academy and four years of Naval Academy. So before I even graduated the Naval Academy, I've invested five years into the Navy. All right. So now when I get to Lieutenant, which is about the time when people starting to think about getting out, because it's still early enough that you can pivot and carry on with your life and be very successful right. At the, uh, eight year Mark. Well, um, you know, let's keep it simple at the five-year Mark when you might be considering getting out that's actually 10 years, right? The Naval Academy grad. So, and that was, that was my first, you know, after that first tour, which was challenging, uh, emotionally and mentally, when I wanted to quit, that was one of the things my dad said. He goes, Hey, you, you've already invested 10 years. It's not 10 years towards retirement, but it's still a lot of time. Um, well then you stay five more years now you're at 15 years investment, but only 10 years for retirement, you know, you see where it's going, right.

LH (00:31:54):

So really you shouldn't try to quit when you first graduated, you're obligated to five years. So, but yes, I mean, if you're enjoying what you're doing and I was, and the nice thing about the military and especially the intelligence community is you don't become a, uh, you're not specialized. It's not, it does not become routine. Every single job is different. There are so many aspects of the intelligence community that you can do, um, that it keeps it exciting. It keeps it challenging. You don't actually go into the job knowing what you do, you're doing. Um, I like to think of it as a sink or swim method where you're basically reinventing yourself, right? And so by the time, and I didn't have a very typical career, I made some, um, strategic decisions along the way to change my designator again, um, based off of wanting to have more children and balance and military.

LH (00:32:56):

So, um, after I left Japan, I went to Hawaii and in Hawaii, um, back to Hawaii now as an intelligence officer, um, I met, um, a small cadre of people that were managing reserves. And back then they were called, um, training and administration of reserves tar. Now they're referred to, as full-time support, this was a small community of maybe 77 officers. Um, and their only job was to manage the Navy intelligence reserve force because of the reserve component is part time, but there are problems and I E administrative pay, uh, mobilization deployment, all that that's full-time and you needed someone, um, behind the scenes to manage that all the time for them. So that when they came back one weekend out of the month, two weeks out of a year, they could optimize that time and not wasted on tracking down a pay problem. Right?

LH (00:33:57):

So I, when I met these people at my command that were doing just that, I was like, this is, this is amazing. I love this job, you know? So you just take care of people the whole time. And, and then in the back of my head, I'm like, and you know, and you don't go to sea, and you still make it six, you have kids and you move around and you promote, and I did. I changed my designator again. Uh, so I went from being an active duty intelligence officer to a, my dad's like, you do know what tar spelled backwards is, right. I'm like dad.

LH (00:34:37):

And then they, um, so I switched over to tar and then I don't know what happened, but the Navy decided to move the goalpost and said, Oh, now that you're with us, we're going to disestablish this community. So, um, I switched over, I went to my first tour, uh, reserve management tour in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. So if you can imagine in the dead of winter, moving your family from Hawaii to Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, I'm like Willow, who where's that I had to come back and tell my husband, who's a native of California. We're going from Hawaii to Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. How do I break this to him? Well, he's a rabid Raiders fan. So I, I started looking at the NFL map to see where could the Raiders show up while we were in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania in this conversation that I'm going to convince, this is a great thing.

LH (00:35:35):

Um, and my best friend different from the one I mentioned earlier, um, she also switched over the same time I did. Um, in fact, our detailer, which is another word for monitor your army, right? So your monitor is the person that tells you where you're going to go, right? Ours, they're

called detailers in the Navy. So he called us both up. He says, Hatcher Regati, I've got two places. You can go. Um, Devin, uh, Fort Devins, Massachusetts and Willow Grove, Pennsylvania, call me back tomorrow or coming where you're going. And we're like, uh, which is the worst of two evils, Devons, Massachusetts, or Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. So we had to deconflict, I, I came back with Willow Grove because the Raiders could play right Pittsburgh in Baltimore, Philadelphia, it's all about keeping home happy.

LH (00:36:38):

So, um, absolute best tour. My life was taking care of 300 reservists. Uh, they were, uh, assigned to New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania, and, um, loved it, loved it. And I'm so disappointed when at the end of that tour, towards the end of that tour, the rumors started circling that they were going to take all those 77 billets that were a part of that small community and reinvest them into the, into the active duty Navy. And, uh, I was really, I was really upset, uh, because really the writing on the wall was, um, they were just trying to take those billets and use them elsewhere, uh, under the guise that the active duty can take care of the reserves. And that is absolutely false because in order for you to be successful as an active duty intelligence officer taking care of a service is not career enhancing.

LH (00:37:39):

It's not sexy. It's not going to get you to that Admiral. Um, it's an amazing leadership opportunity. Um, but you're not going to get promoted if you spend a couple of years doing administrative work. Um, and so, you know, in that community, you were insulated from all that nonsense, right? And we had our own career paths and you had your own milestones that you had to make, and you could make Oh six, um, taking care of reserves and you became an expert in it, right? Because it's a different language. It's different PayScale, all that stuff. Uh, and so, um, I'm like the active duty is not going to end, even if they do learn it in one tour, they're not going to come back to this, you know, uh, this type of world so that they can draw from that experience. So, so I vowed that if I could, I would try to continue to get those jobs while I progressed through.

LH (00:38:39):

Cause they gave you, they gave us a choice in terms of where to go. Once they got rid of the community, you can go home, go figure, you can go home by this time. You know, I've got like 15 years in. Um, you can go to another FTS community, another full-time support community. HR, HR looked at us and said, Oh, look what they just did. They dropped off the cliff. Lets not follow them. You homeless people come to us. You could go to another community or you could go back into active duty intelligence and try to compete with those peers that didn't just do what you did. You could detour. Right? So I was junior enough and I had my surface warfare pin. So I had operational time, which most intelligence officers don't at that point that I took a gamble. And I went back in.

LH (00:39:32):

I said, I, I will, I will go back. And I will try and compete, uh, with, with my active duty counterparts. And it just worked out for me. I was able to obviously rise all the way up to the ranks of Oh six as an intelligence officer. And I still took two more reserve management tours on

my way. I kept my promise. That's right, because when you can walk into a room and speak reserves, as an active duty person, had the credibility, you know, as an active duty person with your activity, counterparts and speak a different language, you know, you're suddenly the smartest person in the room because nobody cares about how you get that reservist in the seat next to you working their eyes glaze over. When you start talking about ADT and ASW and all these other things that make reserves go, they don't care about all that. They just want to know how, wow, you got me extra help.

LH (00:40:37):

They just pressed the [?] button. I realized I can do some good if I can, if I can not only take care of this, this, uh, this community of people that have served twice as hard as I have the things that we make our reservists do, the accountability, the standards that we hold for them are so far more stringent than for the active duty. You know, if I skip my flu shot, no one is kicking me out. Right. Right. The reserve is, Oh, you've skipped your flu shot. Let's process you out for not being ready. Like, wait, wait, wait, wait. And that's where I saw my role as, okay, wait a minute. Let's find out why they skipped their flu shot. Let me call them. Okay. [?], why don't you go ahead and fax that from CVS and I'll get it over to the person that's going to process you out.

LH (00:41:31):

You know, it was so simple fix things. If you just took the time to find out, you know, how you could help. And that's, that's why I love doing that job because there were so many details and taking care of them that many people just didn't have the time or the patience, or understood how to manipulate the system to get, you know, not only what the Navy needed, but what the reserves needed too. So, um, you know, and now some of my best friends supporting me and my small business are reservist. So is your husband reserve is that.

HS (00:42:07):

he's AGR So I guess the army equivalent.

LH (00:42:12):

It is the army equivalent, it is. So you understand he would understand what I'm talking about.

HS (00:42:19):

Can you tell me a little bit about your 9/11 Experience?

LH (00:42:22):

Oh, Oh, I was in Hawaii. I actually had the duty, my beepers going off at, so it would have been don't quote me at four o'clock

LH (00:42:33):

In the morning, I guess, Hawaii times. Cause we were six hours

LH (00:42:36):

Behind. I'm pregnant with my second child, September, October, November, December, January, February, March, April. Okay. So I had seen [?] I was what, five months pregnant, four months, something like that. Uh, and it, it, uh, obviously everybody, when you think about nine 11, it's like, you know where you were. Right. Uh, my husband's out watering new sod that we put in our new house that we really can't afford in Hawaii and, and the beeper goes off and I turn on the TV and of course I'm seeing it unfold on TV and I'm like, Hey Gary, come in and look at this. And uh, and of course I've got to go and I'm an intelligence officer I got to go into work. Right, You know, so I get dressed up in my maternity wear, which is always just a comical thing to look at.

LH (00:43:37):

It's like a giant potato bag sack, you know, it's khaki. Uh, most people don't realize that no, I'm not missing my belt. I'm pregnant. I know I haven't tucked my shirt in, it's actually my uniform. But I remember I was stationed at camp Smith, uh, which is the headquarters for the Pacific theater. Absolutely beautiful small Marine Corps base and the very top of this, uh, mountain, essentially looking down over amazing views, amazing views. Um, and it's nestled inside this neighborhood, as everything is nestled inside neighborhoods in the crowded Oahu Island, uh, the road up to camp Smith go straight up it's bumper to bumper, right? Because all the bases are in heightened security, locking down the flow of traffic is at a standstill. Pretty much the Island's at gridlock, right? Because if you know anything about Hawaii, I don't know how many bases there are, but it's a lot.

LH (00:44:46):

And so at some point the spillover is going to create gridlock. Um, so my husband tries to get me up as close as possible using the back streets. Uh, um, and I ended up having to walk up pathway and I told my son this, the one I was pregnant with, he's the one that's going to the military. Now he's 18. I told my son this story. I said, you know, during nine 11, I was walking up the Hill pregnant with you and I pass a car and they roll down the window and they ma'am. Can I give you a ride? And I looked back at them and say, I'm going to get there way before you are even as slow as I'm waddling. And it wasn't even, I mean, even the reason I was wearing maternity wear at that point is because by your second kid, you know, your body's like, Oh, we know what we're doing familiar with that.

LH (00:45:38):

Even if you're only, I remember at four months, you couldn't even tell I was pregnant with the first one, but at four months with the second, one's like, cool. So I had to put on the bag, you can relate, I can relate. I'm like, I'm going to make it to the top of the Hill way before he will. But thank you for the ride. I must've said that 12 times going up the Hill, cause everybody sees a pregnant woman and they're like, they want to help, but you're not moving at all. I'm almost there. It was a long walk. Uh, and then, you know, the rest is obviously history, but, uh, then you go into, when you're an intelligence officer, you go and do into watch mode and, and crisis management. And um, but yeah, I was, it was a world away too, you know?

LH (00:46:26):

And of course the other thing I remember is, Oh my God, what, what world am I bringing this child into? You know, forgetting that I already had a child in the world, but you know, your, your hormones and your emotions are suddenly like, you know, going crazy.

HS (00:46:44):

I know you've touched on it a little bit, but can you speak to your experience as a woman in the Navy?

LH (00:46:49):

Yes. Uh, I guess so, you know, I don't think I've ever gone through life acknowledging that, um, um, woman came on completely wrong. Never has been, um, let me silence that phone. Um, never, never did anything in the context of I'm a woman [?] in uniform. I was always in the context of I'm I can do this. You know, if you want to start pointing out gender and race and whatever makes you feel better to justify why I'm getting the job and you're not go for it, but that's not the way I look at it, which is why, you know, and I think this is a, I think this is something that women do.

LH (00:47:45):

I know this is something that women do is that we tend to want to be perfect and study things to the point that we are 100% sure that we could be successful. Whereas most men will walk in and say, yeah, I can do that. Even if they have no experience or they can maybe no 50%, but a woman never walks in and goes, I can do that without no kidding. Let me go home and study, you know, and make sure I can, because there's always this perception that you're gotta be better. Otherwise, in my mind, it was, I would tell young women, if you're having a bad hair day, we're all having a bad hair day. You represent all women. It's just a fact of life. If you decide that you want to get pregnant right before deployment or all like that, we're all, all of them do that.

LH (00:48:35):

All women just get pregnant to get out of deployment. It's unfortunate, right? But we're, the standards are, you know, are set in a, I think a little bit higher for us because we are the minority, but I never really approached anything that way. I just tried to be the best I could mainly because most people, you know, growing up in the eighties, um, seventies and eighties, um, in a very different environment, European, if you will, with, with that military background, there was no distinguishing between girls and boys and whether or not you can do something or not. You know, and my parents always encouraged me to do everything I put my mind to it. And so, um, that was never an excuse. I don't know if that answered your question. Um, I acknowledge now that yes, you know, uh, I, I'm probably, uh, inspiring women. And I think as I became a parent, that was something that I consciously thought about was in my own career. There were no women that, that looked like me or that had children. And that used to bother me because I thought that isn't it odd that a whole generation of sailors are going to come up behind us, female sailors and think that to make a success out of your military career, you have to be single with no children and angry.

LH (00:50:10):

So not going to be single not going, going to have children and I'm not going to be angry. Right. Um, angry part is a joke, but there were, there are a few women that, um, you know, along the way that had chips on their shoulders and, and rightly so, right, because they probably fought really hard to get to and had to prove themselves over and over to get to where they are. But it, it dawned on me that, wow. Um, I, you know, personally, yes, I want to have children, but that's an example I can set to young women and men really that you can have it all do not have to gone as a generation where you have to get out to have a child, you can manage it. And that's why the AGR community, the FTS community, the tar community, if we're translating for all the services, um, that's why that community appealed to me was because I could continue to have children. Um, not that I was afraid to go to sea, but that whole deployment thing, wasn't the very first thing I wanted to do. Uh, having had small children, but I could continue going on that path. Um, as long as I was promoting and be successful. Now, once I converted back over to active duty, the first thing that happened was I went to sea, all that work for nothing.

LH (00:51:32):

I mean, I went to a ship. It didn't technically go to sea because it was a brand new ship. It was new construction, but I still was on sea duty, still got on the way. There were still a lot of long, long, long hours. And my husband was still alone with three boys. At this point, when you look at your military career, is there something that stands out that you're particularly proud of? Um, well, there's highlights. Um, I'm proud of the fact that I made it to Oh six, despite the weird path I decided to take. Um, I always tell people don't emulate. Don't do it the way I did. It's impossible. I did it my way start singing. Um, you know, the, my carrier tour, uh, was a highlight, uh, in that, um, I was assigned to the USS George HW Bush, which is the aircraft carrier named after president Bush 41, the elder and, uh, had an opportunity to meet him and Barbara Bush. Um, it was just an amazing experience. Um, remember I got sent there, uh, well, I didn't tell you that part of the story. So nobody would take the ship. None of my peers wanted to go because it was a new ship. New commission means it's going to be in the dry dock for at least two years, probably during your entire tour. There's no way you're going to make Oh six out of that job because it's not going on deployment. Okay. I'll take it.

LH (00:53:15):

Meanwhile, he's like really the detail. I can't get anybody to take the ship I'm there. And it's because my attitude always is you have make the best out of every single situation, right? So if you listen to the guy that says, you're not going to get promoted on the ship that doesn't go out of the dry dock. If you listen to them, then that's probably what's going to happen. You're going to go with that attitude. Well, I'm not going to get promoted. So I'm just not going to do anything. I'm just going to be here. But if you go in and seek opportunities to Excel, it might work out for you and unbeknown to me, I was voluntold, uh, to run the commissioning ceremony for the George HW. Bush. Um, and I, uh, because what else is the intelligence officer doing in an empty ship besides, you know, making sure that, uh, the dust isn't settling in your empty compartments, that aren't going to be filled for another two years after you've gone.

LH (00:54:18):

But I mean, my job on the carrier was to make sure that my spaces were eventually ready and, um, met the security standards, um, for all the intelligence, uh, gear that would eventually get in there. But I had to actually go back as a guest years later to actually see the fruits of my labor.

Um, in the meantime, my job was also to train that, that crew, because some of those sailors ended up staying way longer than I did because their enlistment, uh, um, contracts require them at sea to be there for, in some cases three or four or five years, I was there for, I mean, 18 months. Um, but in those 18 months, um, I got to plan the largest party in the United States. Uh, if you remember correctly, the son (Bush Jr.) was the president at the time. So the entire government, the entire government, and I know that all the, not all supposed to be in the same place at the same time, someone was left back, but it was somebody way down on the, I don't know who that was, who was running the government at the time that this party was going on, but the entire government was on that pier.

LH (00:55:25):

So needless to say it was a stressful situation, it was like a wedding planner on steroids. Uh, so, um, great opportunity to, and, um, I've always been a planner. So, um, I really did enjoy the networking and coordinating across every entity. You can imagine, uh, on the base, um, there was a contract company that comes in and helps you with the invitations and the gala and the party and the coordinating and the pictures. I mean, there's just so much going on right. Only to realize that the day of you can have the best well laid plans until the secret service shows up and says, yeah, we don't need this and decide to change your plans. Like, uh, it's the night of January in, on the East coast. So it was cold. Um, they decide that the crowd can not bring in blankets. This is a detail that would have been good to know earlier, earlier, right? Because we have just come up with a comprehensive transportation plan of getting people from parking lots on the other side of the base or off the base or wherever they're coming from into this area, through the magnetrometers. And we're now confiscating blankets.

LH (00:56:57):

I was beside myself. You couldn't mention that. I want to put that on the invitation. I wouldn't be, you know, something. So I don't know, I wasn't down on the pier for that point. I'm up in the ship, you know, pull my hair out on something else. But I would imagine that was a nightmare, but little things like that, uh, we had a great plan laid out and then they did, they came in at the last minute for security purposes, you know, I get it. Um, but definitely stressful. But I would say that was a highlight. And mainly because my commanding officer at the time, um, and, uh, the administrative officer secretly, um, had a personal award, uh, made for me. And then they surprised me during the gala and presented it in front of the entire ship in front of the entire Navy chain of command that was at the gala. And they had the president, George HW Bush present it to me. Wow. Yeah. Wow. I was not expecting that. Um, and he signed it, which I thought, wow, you can't do that.

LH (00:58:20):

It did take a long time for it actually to get entered in my, in my record for the longest time, it wouldn't show up. I'm like, are you really gonna tell the president? He can't sign it, go for it. But yes, that was the highlight. And then, um, I guess the proof in the pudding is I have a picture of him kissing me on the cheek in front of everybody, me looking completely stunned at that point. But, uh, absolutely. I, I'm just proud to be a very tiny part of that amazing legacy, you know? Um, he has no clue that he kissed a Democrat, but that'd be our secret.

HS (00:59:08):

What was the transition like when you went, when you decided to retire?

New Speaker (00:59:14):
Um, so military job, we could have a whole other chat about military transition. Military transition is, um, is different for everybody. Everybody's path is different. Um, I do a lot of mentoring now, uh, for anybody who wants to speak about it, but through my photography business, I end up talking a lot about transition, um, because I try to focus on veterans who are transitioning out in terms of headshots. And then we get to talking about it and I've been out for two years. Um, the first year, um, after the first year I looked back and I realized it was probably more challenging than I then when I was going through it. Right. Uh, and it's when you stay in, as long as I did. So 31 years I joined when I was 17.

LH (01:00:10):
You know, for me looking back, I tell people, it was like losing a parent or a sibling, like a death in the family. Right? You, you go through a grieving process and it doesn't necessarily hit you when it happens, right? Like if you're expecting a family member to die, they die, they pass away. Right. Because you know, it's coming. So I knew retirement was coming, but maybe not until six months, a year, does it actually hit you. Maybe something triggers it. And for me, it was probably about a year after, after I'd already gotten settled into the civilian world. And I still don't feel comfortable that I realized, wow, I, uh, this isn't a lot more emotional than I realized. Um, because you know, not some, not one to tell you that I can't do something we've already established that. Right. Right. And so, you know, we are conditioned before we even get out.

LH (01:01:04):
And I think through your entire career, you're conditioned that you're going to get another job that you're going to have a paycheck. You're going to have benefits. You're going to have probably a commute. These are all things that are ingrained in your head because that's what you become accustomed to. But what you don't realize is you get to choose, you get to choose how far that commute is. You get to choose how much the benefit is. You get to choose the paycheck. All those choices suddenly become very, very overwhelming. They sound like they're easy choices, but they're really not. There was such an insulation that you're in, when you're in the military taxes, for example, I've got my butt kicked by taxes. That first year I spent, uh, an exorbitant amount of money out of pocket fixing something that I didn't know was broken, right. Because I was exempt, uh, California residents. I was exempt my entire career. And suddenly I am now paying taxes, which sounds like such a simple thing, right. To the civilian, listening to this and paying taxes my whole life. I have been paying taxes my whole life as well, but someone's been doing it for me. And I never thought about it, you know, so I was, uh, one of my really good friends who retired a couple of years before me. I told her, I got, I feel like I'm graduating from college again. I'm learning how to be an adult.

LH (01:02:31):
There's just so many things that I didn't know how to do because the military, the maybe did it all for me. And so, um, it took about two years to figure that out. Uh, but it's definitely challenging, so what I would say to people who are transitioning is, you know, stay positive plan for it. Like it's going to be another PCs or another command, you know, study for it, get the training, make

the connections and all that. But if it doesn't go according to plan that's okay. Right. Cause that's part of the transition too. That's part of the journey, you know? And so I got a job right out, right before I even was off active duty. I was double-dipping for a couple of weeks, which is no surprise to anybody that I had a job, um, completely before I was done with the other ones.

LH (01:03:21):

But it took me about a year to realize I don't like this, like working for somebody. What do you mean? I don't have to wake up in the morning really? And when you have a pension, if you stay in, as long as I do you realize you don't necessarily have to get such a high paying job that comes with those pressures and hours and nonsense, right. Um, you might actually be able to, um, do something that you're passionate about, like photography, like I'm doing, you might actually be able to work for yourself or start a franchise or go work part-time until you get comfortable. But we come out of the military thinking I got to make as much money as I did when I was in, I was a captain. I had to make this much money. Oh, wait, I've got a super inflate that because I was a captain. And then this is how much health insurance costs. And this is how much, and then suddenly I got to make 200,000 a year.

LH (01:04:19):

No, you don't. I mean, unless you're moving into a mansion, but the Navy just taught you how to live in poverty for the last years. I'm sorry, live within your means.

HS (01:04:34):

Right. I know what you mean.

LH (01:04:36):

Now we don't know any better because we're on this side. And then when you get on the other side, you realize, Oh, I can survive on my pension and a little bit extra here and there and still enjoy it. Now I may not be going on vacations, but who is during COVID right, right. But you know what so, so that was an education was, um, you can listen to all this advice and the hype, but really, it goes back to what I said when I started, it's a personal journey, you know, you've got to find the right job, but this is now the rest of your life. If you stayed in, as long as I did, you know, do you really want to be unhappy, You know, do something that is going to get you excited to wake up in the morning or sleep in the morning.

HS (01:05:29):

Um, is there anything about your career that we haven't talked about that you'd like to share? I know that's a super broad open-ended question.

LH (01:05:39):

I think we talked about at all. Um, I mean, I have plenty of stories, but nothing, nothing, nothing specific. Um, no,

HS (01:05:53):

Laura, I want to thank you so much for your time today.

LH (01:05:56):
Yes, my pleasure.